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Dixon, George Dallas

Selling passenger service

Philadelphia, Pa.

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Selling Passenger Service

An Address by
GEORGE DALLAS DIXON
Vice-President in Charge of Traffic
Pennsylvania Railroad Company

Delivered at the Opening of the Forty-fourth Annual Convention of the American Association of Traveling Passenger Agents, at Philadelphia, October 2, 1916.

Selling Passenger Service

An Address Delivered by
GEORGE DALLAS DIXON
Vice-President in Charge of Traffic
Pennsylvania Railroad Company

At the Forty-fourth Annual
Convention of the American
Association of Traveling
Passenger Agents

I am very happy, indeed, to extend to you the greetings of the Pennsylvania Railroad in its home city. I see that in the "last call" for your meeting, your trip here is described as an educational tour, and that it is further declared to be one of the finest ever arranged. That description is a just one. Between Philadelphia, Valley Forge, Gettysburg, Washington and Mt. Vernon you will see many of the spots made most sacred and memorable by the greatest events of our history.

Here in Philadelphia, and in its surrounding cities, you will have an opportunity to study some of the best examples of what is really great and, in the truest sense, big, in American business. You will see some of the greatest American department stores, the largest publishing house, some large shipyards and an important textile district. You will pass along one of the finest river fronts in

the United States, which is being rapidly developed both by private interests and by the enterprise of the city of Philadelphia, now engaged in the work of constructing several additional large municipal piers.

Winning Good Will a Vital Work

You, the outside men of the railroads of the country, are doing a great work, in many respects a vital work. It is true that you do not run the trains and that people would still travel if you ceased your labors. Nevertheless, upon the manner in which you conduct yourselves and the extent to which you serve the true interests, not only of your Companies but of your patrons, largely depends the opinion which the public at large forms and holds of the railroads. Your personal contact with the public is closer, probably, than that of any other class of men in the railroad service. I need hardly tell you that the good-will and confidence of the public mean more than almost any other consideration to the railroads today.

The Value of an Impression

See to it, therefore, that whenever you talk to a man, or approach him on business, you deal with him in such a manner as to increase his confidence and

respect and good feeling toward yourself, and, through yourself, toward the enterprise you represent and the railroads as a whole. It may well be of more value to you and to your Company to leave a patron or possible patron, or a group of patrons, with such an impression than to ticket a large party. Without knowing it, you may be selling freight service as well as passenger service. You will surely be helping, in a measurable degree, to strengthen the general railroad situation.

Importance of Creating Business

There are one or two thoughts I would like to leave with you today. The first is the importance of giving careful consideration to the possible ways and means by which you may actually *create* business. By this I mean inducing people to take journeys they otherwise would not take, as distinguished from merely getting away from your competitors business that would exist anyway.

A passenger traffic man enjoys a most important advantage over the freight traffic man in this respect, namely, that the possibilities for increasing and fostering passenger business are relatively greater than those for increasing freight traffic. Let me explain just what I mean. Passenger traffic consists of the volun-

tary movements of human beings, and freight traffic of the involuntary movements of things. The passenger travels at his own will, but freight moves merely at the will of the shipper. The number of possible journeys that a passenger may take is limited only by the length of his life. Freight ordinarily makes but a single journey before its identity is changed or it is consumed or destroyed.

Passenger *vs.* Freight Traffic

A steel man from Pittsburgh comes to Philadelphia or New York on business. While he is here, he may be made to see the desirability of a run to the shore before he returns. For reasons of business or pleasure he may be induced to repeat his visits to this locality many times, and also to travel in other directions.

But, when the same steel man ships a carload of plates to tidewater for *export,* there is no way to lengthen out their journey or to make them yield a return haul back to Pittsburgh. Upon reaching the eastern terminal, their possibilities for producing railroad traffic in this country are permanently ended. A single one-way haul is the most that can, by any means, be gotten out of such a shipment of freight.

So, bearing in mind the fact that passenger traffic usually involves a round trip, with possibilities of indefinite repetition, I think I am correct in saying that, in the work of *creating* traffic, the passenger man is favored in having a much more elastic medium to work in than the freight man. An actual increase in the volume of freight traffic can only result from increases in the productive activities of industry, mining or agriculture.

The possibilities for the expansion of passenger traffic, however, are by no means limited to the growth in population of communities. An equally important means is in the stimulation of the *desire to travel* by appealing to the imagination and stirring the "wanderlust" that is in the mind of every man, and every woman, too.

Therefore, it seems to me that the wisest passenger men of the future will be those who tend more and more to devote their best energies and their strongest endeavors toward this problem of the creation of new traffic.

A Broad and Rich Field of Work

Whatever you do, do not for one minute allow yourself to fall into the error of believing that the field for creating new passenger traffic is in any sense a

narrow or poor one, or that it even approaches being worked out. On the contrary, it is both broad and rich, and contains vast untouched resources. Travel, like most of the other activities of life, is largely a matter of habit. We, who are in the railroad business, accustomed to traveling ourselves and to contemplating the impressive statistics of passenger traffic, can hardly realize how great is the mass of people who, even in this day of swift communication, can hardly be said to travel at all.

The Army of Non-Travelers

There are here in this city of Philadelphia many thousands of people who have never seen New York. Yet it is only 90 miles away. Still more thousands of Philadelphians have never been to Washington, which is only 137 miles distant, and there are many who have never even seen Atlantic City, the world's greatest seashore resort, and only a little more than an hour's ride from where we are at this moment.

Similar conditions prevail in other cities. It would be rash for me to guess how many hundreds of thousands—no doubt literally millions—of New Yorkers have never been to Philadelphia, but I

think I am perfectly safe in saying that there are scarcely any of them who would not feel a broadening influence in a trip here.

Encouraging the "Travel Habit"

I am not by any means referring to people in destitute circumstances. I am speaking of people whose circumstances would warrant at least occasional travel. There are immense numbers of them, in every part of the country, who practically stay at home from one year's end to the other. They have the stay-at-home habit, just as a much smaller number have the travel habit.

Your greatest work should be to try to increase the number of habitual travelers.

To accomplish this, it is not necessary for you to go about encouraging extravagance. The great majority of these people could, and with great advantage to themselves *should*, be made to see the value of travel to their minds and health, and to realize that an investment now and then in a railroad ticket would yield a good return.

You, who are designated as the traveling passenger agents of the railroads, are, of course, mostly concerned with travel over longer journeys than those I have mentioned, but precisely similar

conditions prevail in your field to those existing in the more local field, and the opportunities for creative work are equally as great, if not greater.

A Pioneer in Traffic Building

I am proud and glad to be able to say that the Pennsylvania Railroad has always been a pioneer in the work of creating traffic. This has been especially true in the creation of the high-grade tourist traffic to the South and West. Let me tell you a single example which will illustrate the way in which this business was built up through the processes of education and solicitation, applied with patience and persistence.

A number of years ago, when the work was in its infancy, our Company arranged a personally conducted tour to California. The tour was of high grade and the tickets were $400 apiece. The Chief Clerk in our Division Passenger Agent's office at Pittsburgh, at that time, was a young man who had come from the neighborhood of Bedford, Pa. Among his friends there were an elderly maiden lady—quite rich, but an extreme believer in the conservation of wealth—and her niece, with whom she lived. The railroad man made up his mind to get both of them for the California tour, and decided

that the right method of approach would be through the niece.

He went about his work carefully, with personal correspondence, attractive literature, etc., and soon had the young woman deeply interested and the aunt moderately so. At length he received a letter from the niece telling him to call on a certain day with two tickets. He did so, and after about an hour's hard work departed, leaving the tickets and taking away with him a check for $800.

Learning to Travel and to Live

Not long after his return to Pittsburgh, the aunt repented of her act and endeavored to cancel the arrangement by wire. The passenger man called again, however, and with great difficulty succeeded in saving the day. The aunt reluctantly consented to go, but told the young man plainly that she believed she was wasting her money and was sorry that he had persuaded her to do so. To his intense surprise, however, on her return from the tour, she stopped off at Pittsburgh, called on him in his office, thanked him for getting her out of the stay-at-home rut, and said, "You have taught me how to live and to travel, and I expect to travel a great deal in the future." And she did.

You must all of you admit that this

was a better piece of work, and a more valuable piece of work for the railroads as a whole, than it would have been if the young man had merely won away from a competitor two patrons who were going on such a tour anyway, but had intended to travel by a rival road.

Rivalry Should Be Fair and Clean

Don't think for one moment that because I have laid so much stress upon creating new business I would want to see an end of your purely competitive work, insofar as that is carried on in proper directions. Competition between the railroads with respect to the excellence of their service, the quickness of their managements to discern the true needs of the public, and the keenness of their soliciting forces in getting after business, are all invigorating and are of benefit to the railroads and their patrons alike. We need the stimulus of spirited rivalry.

But let your competition be always clean and fair and let your methods be always above suspicion. This is the second important point upon which I wished to speak to you. Remember that your competitor has a right to live as well as you, and upon equal terms. If you use such methods as to prevent him from enjoying this right, you invite, in fact you

force, him to adopt the sort of competition that we call destructive, and destructive competition is injurious to all concerned, including—in fact I may say, especially—the public.

Things Always to Be Shunned

We do not cut rates any more. Rate cutting has neither the sanction of public opinion nor of sound business practice. In your endeavors to obtain competitive traffic for your respective lines, therefore, let me suggest these guides to honorable action:

1. Never, to obtain business, violate the letter or spirit of any law or any principle of fair dealing.
2. Never use methods that you would be ashamed to have your competitor or your patrons learn of.
3. Never do anything that will lay you open to the charge of having unfairly discriminated between your patrons.
4. Never treat any one with discourtesy.

Playing Aboveboard—But to Win

What, you may ask, are to be considered the fair methods of competition?

I would say that alertness and courtesy rank among the fairest and most effective. Other things being equal, the first man on the job will get the business.

Know your own Company and the selling points of its service.

Know your competitor, not to belittle its service, but to learn what your own Company has that the other cannot offer. This will show you the kind of business that you can legitimately claim on superior merits.

See that the agents of foreign lines give your Company proper representation, in their territory, on through business.

Remember that your own personal services to patrons, in giving information, arranging itineraries and suggesting worth-while tours, are part of the service that your Company has to offer to the public and that its quality and value in influencing business are entirely in your own hands.

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